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Youth, education and work in (post-)conflict areas

UKFIET conference 2017 Learning and Teaching for Sustainable Development: Curriculum, Cognition and Context, Sub theme Developing Capabilities for Sustainable Livelihoods

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Introduction

'Hope of the nation' reads the text on the shirt of the 'boda boda' driver taking me through Juba in December 2012. A 'boda boda' is a motorcycle used as a means of transport for the people on the back of the vehicle and as a means of earning money by the drivers, mostly young men. In December 2012 Juba was still vibrant with hope and my companion from South Sudan, who used to live as an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) in the North kept meeting people who, just as he did, moved to the South after secession from the North in 2011. The secession followed a war of nearly fifty years between the North and the South. How different is the situation now: in December 2013 factions divided by tribal and political issues took up arms against each other and since then the situation in South Sudan has only changed for the worse. Thousands of people sought refuge in neighbouring countries or became internally displaced people. Recently, after ample considerations, my friend also decided to register as a refugee in northern Uganda. He is in his early thirties now and has been on the move since he was 6 when he travelled (on his own) from his home town Renk in what later became South Sudan to the North to seek education and work and above all a safe place to live.

From the story above it will be clear why the word 'post' has been put between brackets in the title of this paper: the instability of post-conflict areas makes them prone to new conflicts, also in times of relative peace. Young people play a crucial role in these areas. They embody the *'hope of the nation'*. Still, if they do not get the right opportunities, they may easily give up hope and refer to destructive ways to survive such as prostitution, drug abuse, or joining militias. Yet, only regarding youth as victims who missed education and decent work opportunities does not do justice to the experience and resilience they developed during their life in conflict situations. Their agency should form the base for interventions to create meaningful education and work opportunities for them to gain skills and an income, as well as self-esteem as they contribute to the community. The main question to be discussed in this paper is: How can education and work opportunities encourage and build on youth agency in post-conflict areas? Subsequently the following subquestions are going to be discussed:

1. What is the position of youth and youth agency in (post-)conflict areas?
2. What role can education play to support youth agency in (post-) conflict areas?
3. How can youth agency be strengthened and developed through work for individual livelihoods and community development?

The main concepts used throughout this paper derive from three sources. To critically evaluate the situation in post-conflict areas we make use of the concepts of 'negative' and 'positive peace',

developed by Galtung (1976). Negative peace merely refers to the absence of violence whereas positive peace refers to people living together in a sustainable form of peace, where there is no structural violence and conditions for war have been defeated. To understand 'agency' we make use of Giddens (1979; 1991), who discusses agency as opposed to but also interrelated with 'structure'. Agency is the way in which *individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications* (Giddens, 1991, p. 2). Finally, the capability approach of Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (1999) elaborates on the right of each individual to live a life worthy of living. Nussbaum views education as one of the central capabilities as it is not only a capability in itself, but also promotes other capabilities (education as 'fertile functioning').

This paper draws on contributions and discussions in a summer school on 'Youth, education and work in (post-)conflict areas', a combined activity of the research network on Youth, Education and Work (YEW) and the UNESCO chair of Professor Jacques Zeelen on Lifelong Learning, Youth and Work, based in Gulu University, Uganda. The network joins researchers (and practitioners) from all over the world, who are specialised in practice-oriented research such as needs assessments, evaluation research and action research to contribute to the construction of peaceful and sustainable communities (see for example Zeelen, Van der Linden, Nampota, Ngabirano, 2010; Blaak, Tukundane, Van der Linden & Elsdijk, 2016). They have a tradition in creating knowledge through (international) cooperation. The participants of the summer school were invited to join the network in this tradition and contribute to the development of knowledge on youth, education and work in (post-)conflict areas. Participants and lecturers from the five continents (!) joined the sessions to share research and practitioner experiences and develop new perspectives¹. This paper reflects my own processing of the insights developed during the week and subsequently discusses each one of the subquestions. Throughout the paper a tentative answer to the main question will be formulated as a contribution to further discussion and as an attempt to develop policies and practices regarding youth agency in conflict affected areas. Finally, a point of reflection is the appropriate research approach for further research.

The position of youth and youth agency in (post-)conflict areas

'Broken citizenship' is the term with which Angucia (2010) characterised war affected children in northern Uganda following her PhD research on the reintegration of those children in that area some ten years ago. Loosely using the UNESCO definition of youth as people between 15 to 25 years old, the children who featured in that research can now be labelled as 'youth'. This section will discuss the position of youth and youth agency in (post-)conflict areas, based on research in Uganda (Angucia, 2017; Datzberger, 2017a), India (Salam, 2017) and Nepal (Basnet, 2017). Angucia states that the term 'broken citizenship' does not only apply to war affected children and youth, but to the whole community in northern Uganda (Angucia, 2017). The children who came back from abduction by the army of Joseph Kony, returned to towns and villages where citizenship had been destroyed and nowadays live as youth in situations where citizenship is still under construction. Sadly, this seems to be the case in nearly all (post-)conflict areas. People in areas like northern Uganda are at a loss because their social texture has been destroyed. Norms and values that normally lead

¹ I gratefully made use of the presentations by Zeelen, Angucia, Adam, Van der Linden, Fajardo, Almeyda, Salam, Basnet, Datzberger, Friedman, Razer, Ramadan, Angelson, Bednarczyk, Rodrigues and Mohamed, the reports written by Vogel, Kuppens and Gardner and the discussions during the summer school. This paper reflects my own processing of the summer school and can by no means be regarded as a full report. The responsibility for the ideas expressed is mine.

interaction between people are lacking. This makes us understand why the word 'post' cannot do without brackets. Social cohesion has to be invented again. Peace in those areas can be characterised as 'negative' rather than 'positive' (Galtung, 1976). And the structure in terms of the conditions of the reproduction of the society that every social actor should know of (Giddens, 1979) is weak.

People have to use their own compass to guide the way they behave towards each other. This lays a heavy claim on the agency of the people in those areas. In (post-)conflict situations people have to (re)invent a social structure that fits all to prevent old or new conflicts from emerging. Children and youth who grew up during conflicts and have hardly any memory of living in a peaceful community need anchors to interpret and cope with the world surrounding them. In an environment like this it is hard to understand that youth can play a positive role to turn negative peace into positive peace as Angucia (2017) found in her research on youth and peace in northern Uganda. She found different forms of resilience, including community resilience. Also, Salam (2017) and Basnet (2017) discussed examples of youth agency and youth activism in India and Nepal, respectively. In India youth formed the Peoples' Resurgence and Justice Alliance (PRJA) in 2016. Their aim is to bring peace through love and dialogue (bloodless revolution). They have mobilised more than 5000 youngsters in a very short time (using social media). Basnet showed how 'soft' activism turned into violent activism on university campus. This may connect to the constraints faced by the youth as Angucia explains:

We wanted to understand what peace and justice mean to the youth. We asked them how they were practicing peace and/or justice, and we brought this back to them in a workshop. They told us the things they did (e.g. bringing pregnant women to hospitals, working with metal), but also what they couldn't do. In the workshop they worked on the constraints that kept the youth from doing what they had not done so far. By the end of that research, all of them had either an expanded view of their projects, or some of them were going to do new projects (Angucia, 2017, oral presentation).

In her research on youth and political participation Angucia found that youth are either excluded from formal politics or used by political parties in their campaigns. Yet, they show agency, organising themselves in informal ways such as youth clubs and saving groups which they themselves do not regard as political organisations. Also Datzberger (2017a based on Datzberger, McCully & Smith, 2015) looked at youth agency in Uganda. She found factors hampering agency and factors encouraging agency and presented the following conclusions:

1. Improvement in educational infrastructure did not lead to increase in agency (political and economic) of youth at large – in part because secondary education is not entirely free;
2. Structural barriers and indirect violence continue to hamper education and livelihood initiatives – importance of context;
3. Lack of involvement of youth in planning and decision-making processes – involved youth are already privileged;
4. Main focus on empowering youth economically rather than politically;
5. Micro-initiatives more successful than macro-initiatives to promote conflict-resolution and reconciliation (Datzberger, 2017a, PowerPoint sheet 16).

Tentatively, we could conclude that in spite of the background of broken citizenship, young people show agency towards positive peace. Their agency manifests itself in ways that are hardly appreciated and recognised and they meet constraints that may cause them to turn to conflict and violence, which would aggravate the situation.

The role of education in supporting youth agency in (post-) conflict areas

In (post-)conflict areas the educational infrastructure has suffered. Youth and children and many times also adults are left without any education. To tackle arrears we have to look at education in a broad sense, including non-formal education, including adult education and lifelong learning just as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) reads: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. SDG4 not only focuses on access to education but also on quality education. This connects to Nussbaum's view on education as capability and 'fertile functioning' (2011). Education should be meaningful to the learners and to the surrounding communities. What kind of education is meaningful to support youth agency in (post-)conflict areas? To answer this question in this section I will make use of the contributions of Adam (2017) on Sudan, Van der Linden (2017) on the two Sudans, Datzberger (2017b) combining findings from Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda and Friedman, Razer and Ramadan (2017) on Israel.

Adam critically analysed the educational system in (North) Sudan, his country of origin. In his research on school dropout he found that dropout at basic level is 35% and only 37% enrolled at secondary level. By excluding children and youth, school fuels conflict through for example recruitment of school drop-outs as child soldiers (Adam, 2013). Van der Linden (2017) commented on the different roles of education in (North) Sudan and South Sudan (bordering northern Uganda). In Sudan she found educated youth waiting at home for a job whereas in northern Uganda they played a role in rebuilding the community by voluntarily cooperating in a community development organisation with a women's group (see also Van der Linden, 2014 and 2016). This is not representative for the two countries but it points at the different roles of education. Education does not necessarily lead to agency.

The research consortium on Education and Peacebuilding of which Datzberger makes part formulated four roles for education in peace building, together forming the 4Rs Analytical Framework. The first three Rs stem from the work of Frazer: Redistribution (equal access, equal distribution of funds), Recognition (language, curriculum, text books) and Representation (participation in decision making processes) (Frazer, 2005). The fourth R referring to Reconciliation is added by the consortium (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, & Smith, 2017). The research consortium used this framework to analyse the contribution of education to peace building in Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda. Although the framework is certainly helpful to critically evaluate the way in which education supports 'positive peace' as discussed before, the way it is used to analyse the role of education somehow seems to take the educational system as it is for granted. Three remarks or additions can be made. The first is that one should look beyond formal education and also include non-formal education and lifelong learning. The second is that education contributing to sustainable peace is served by in depth analysis and long term processes in the primary process. The third is about the goal of education: does it take into account the priorities of individuals and communities in (post-)conflict areas? Does it offer the skills and knowledge people need to survive and strength their communities? Van der Linden (2015) reflected on this when she analysed the (educational) activities of a community organisation in northern Uganda which united a women's group and a youth group. Also Datzberger seems to have run into this aspect when she concluded that *micro-initiatives more successful than macro-initiatives to promote conflict-resolution and reconciliation* (Datzberger, 2017a, PowerPoint sheet 16).

In fact, Datzberger's conclusion formed a good upbeat to the work presented by Friedman, Razer and Ramadan (2017). In higher education in Israel Jewish and Palestinian students sit together in class. This is the first time in their lives for them to be so close to each other. Yet, when their teachers start discussing peace building in class, the students resist. The students see themselves as 'one big happy family' and although they do not mingle, they deny that the differences that play a role outside the university exist inside the university. Friedman, Razer and Ramadan work on inclusive education (Razer & Friedman, 2017) and view it as important to practice what they preach in their own classes. This means trying to understand why students from both sides maintain the 'happy family myth', opening up themselves about the myths they grew up with themselves, reframing what they first saw as resistance and breaking through it. This is a difficult process which includes struggling with the administration about the language of instruction, among others. The fact that Friedman, Razer and Ramadan stem from different backgrounds themselves (Jewish, born and raised in USA, Jewish, born and educated in Israel, Palestinian, born and educated in Israel) made this all the more impressive.

Summarizing, this section showed how education can play the role of fertile functioning in Nussbaum's terms in different ways. It needs a broad concept of education and a critical review of curriculums and approaches appropriate to the learners and their communities. Furthermore, restoring broken citizenship (Reconciliation) needs long term processes at micro level for people to reframe the beliefs which are part of the structure in which they have been brought up. A new concept to be introduced here to understand how education can play a role in change is the 'enclave' (Friedman, 2011). Education can form an 'enclave' where people can open up towards each other, work on reframing their initial feelings of resistance and experiment new behaviour.

Youth agency and work for individual livelihoods and community development

At first sight there is work 'galore' for active youth in post-conflict areas. Angucia already described their resilience as a competence to build on. She found youth do not need 'programming for work', but they need an enabling environment. What then is an enabling environment? Certainly more than the slogan 'Be job creator instead of employment seeker' implies making each person individually responsible for his success on the labour market (Scherjon, 2011). The contributions from Colombia (Fajardo & Almeyda, 2017; Bednarczyk, 2017) may help us. Peace with the guerrilla movement in Colombia is recent and fragile (not all guerrilla organisations signed). People from the guerrilla, mostly youth, have to be reintegrated into society. Almeyda consulted experts by experience in El Salvador:

They said that when thinking about programmes to train youth to reintegrate them, we have to make youth feel welcome and feel part of the community. Secondly, they said that they need psychological support to deal with trauma, and thirdly, to increase their self-esteem. Moreover, one of the Salvadorian women said that we should take into consideration youth's experience during conflict (she took care of the wounded). We should also take into account youth's preferences. Do we want to train women in agriculture, if they don't want to do agriculture? Lastly, we need to recognise youth (their certificate): sometimes certificates from abroad are not valid in the home country (Almeyda, 2017, oral presentation).

The work that is obviously there and needs to be done in agriculture, may not match the wishes of the youth. Their experiences as guerrillas should be taken into account. This may also feed into their self esteem. Fajardo pointed at the role of cooperatives and solidarity organisations. They support the agency of individuals. Participatory planning and budgeting supports these organisations at the

level of districts and municipalities. Based on his experiences in the province of SantAnder, University of San Gil, Fajardo shared the following lessons learned:

1. Awareness of the aspirations and needs of youth and their leading role in social transformation;
2. Need to create innovative work opportunities in rural areas;
3. Education must be relevant to the needs and aspirations of the rural population;
4. Institutional articulation to respond to the current challenges of human development in a scenario of globalization;
5. Entrepreneurship for associative/solidarity enterprises as an alternative to generate self-employment;
6. Early development of human capacities for life in: culture, citizenship, economy (Fajardo, 2017, oral presentation).

What strikes in this list is that the contribution of the youth to social transformation is stressed. Bednarczyk (2017) showed how participatory budgeting is used to build and strengthen youth organisations in Medellin in Colombia. There are three important rules to participatory budgeting: the budget should be clear, decision making transparent and the project rules known. This is important to gain the trust of young people: they can actually see the effect. Participatory budgeting is part of participatory democracy. It is usually implemented at city-level. The importance of the community and the contribution of youth to the community was also shown in the contributions of Angelson (2017) on an asset based micro finance programme in Sri Lanka, Rodrigues (2017) on the landless movement in Brazil and Mohammed (2017) on drivers of conflict and violence in Nigeria. A useful toolbox (<http://work4youthinfragilestates.com/en/>) based on experiences in Burundi and South Sudan was shared by Van Bruggen (2017)

Summing up, research on the link between youth and community showed that there is potential in youth to contribute to positive peace in the community. If connected to funding this may lead to innovative jobs rather than just point at jobs that need to be done real time. This may complement the concept of 'enclave' necessary to develop peace at micro level. The enclave needs support and acknowledgement from the community (participatory budgeting; land rights). Youth agency and community show to be strongly related, whereby youth can play a role towards positive transformation.

Tentative conclusion and discussion

The findings and insights discussed above have been collected in different settings. Each contribution started with a brief description of the context, which was important to understand the specific challenges to youth agency and the forms it could take. Still, bringing together the realities of the different places where conflict had dominated the recent past or still dominated, gave some 'food' to reflect on the main question: How can education and work opportunities encourage and build on youth agency in post-conflict areas? The joint knowledge production that took place contributes to the UKFIET subtheme 'developing capabilities for sustainable livelihoods', specifically for conflict torn areas.

Subsequently going through the subquestions that were discussed in the previous sections, I expose the knowledge gained and the issues identified for further elaboration. To start with the characterisation of post-conflict areas as areas of 'broken citizenship' help to understand how difficult it is to move from negative peace to positive peace. Positive peace involves social cohesion in which people participate and feel recognised. Just this is missing in many post-conflict

environments. Although one may expect the opposite, there are people, including youth, who showed resilience during the conflict and afterwards commitment to the community. The agency showed is different from traditional ways of political participation that adults may expect from them (Angucia, 2017). Failure to recognise new ways of agency may result in adverse forms of radicalisation (Salam, 2017; Basnet, 2017).

Education can provide the necessary tools for participation in community building as the 4R framework developed by Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith (2017) implies. As indicated in SDG4 a broad view on education including lifelong learning is necessary to make up for arrears (Adam, 2017; Van der Linden, 2017). To work on sustainable positive peace we have to look at what happens in micro settings like the class room. Sitting side by side does not automatically create deeper understanding. Framing and reframing to create this understanding is hard work for both teachers and learners (Friedman, Razer & Ramadan, 2017). The 'enclave' formed by the class room can be helpful to stimulate change, but can only be temporary to allow education to play the role of fertile functioning as Nussbaum (2011) discussed.

The bottom line is for peace to be sustainable is that people have to dispose of a sustainable livelihood. The relation between education and such a sustainable livelihood is not always that strong. This is an aspect to work on making sure that youth gain the competencies and skills they need to make a living and contribute to the community. Youth show agency forming groups and collectives (Fajardo & Almeyda, 2017), which could also be considered as 'enclaves'. These enclaves may challenge existing power structures (Rodrigues, 2017). They need conducive environments trusting their capacities (Bednarczyk, 2017) to get recognition and basic resources. In the end communities may benefit from the transformative power of the youth. This refers to the aspect of agency that engages in (re)shaping surrounding structures.

Looking back at our main question, before formulating an answer I would like to quote Miguel Fajardo from Colombia, who replied when I sent the report: *Now we can review and make new reflections about the issues we talked about in the summer school*. That is exactly why I call the conclusion an tentative one. It just reflects work in progress, for which fortunately the first joint steps are made. As a start, throughout the different contributions we noticed that youth agency should not be viewed in isolation from the surrounding structure. Encouraging and building on youth agency means creating enabling environments to which youth contribute as co creators of structure. Education has to play its fertile role in this dynamic perspective. It should support youth in reshaping their environment to the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. In terms of theory, this points at the interplay between youth agency and structure. Allow me to repeat the quote from the beginning of this text. Agency is the way in which *individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications* (Giddens, 1991, p. 2).

Research comes in to accompany this dynamic view on youth agency. So far, I did not discuss the research approach used in the research presented. In most of the contributions statistics were used to show the urgency and scope of problems but when it came to in depth understanding more qualitative approaches were needed. The strength of the discussions in the summer school was in the interdisciplinary work jointly producing new knowledge. People from different countries, different educational backgrounds and with different experiences in conflict areas shared practice and research experiences linking theory to practice. We worked as 'pracademics' as one of the

participants said 'Activists at heart, researchers in practice'. Action research is an approach that concurs with this practice, though not used strictly as other types of (small scale) research may also contribute (Van der Linden & Zeelen, 2008). The participation of youth not only as respondents but as co-researchers is indispensable to bestow meaning on findings and work on framing and reframing, linked to innovation. Youth participation is an improvement to take into account for the next summer school, which will hopefully take place in northern Uganda. The venture to develop meaningful alternatives to youth in post-conflict situations is crucial to a peaceful future. That is why research is indispensable to reflect on the process and develop (new) knowledge by writing, discussing, developing and confronting experiences with other experiences and theories. 'Hope of the nation' with which this article started, should not be a sheer slogan. It should be a shared responsibility.

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